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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the criteria for hiring student tutors for college developmental reading programs, their tutoring responsibilities, their training program, and their supervision. It enumerates some general guidelines for planning a tutoring training program and for supervising the tutors and presents specific suggestions for planning preservice and inservice programs. The areas in which college tutors often require continuing assistance, special considerations involved in supervising, common problems, and the effectiveness of college level student tutors are also discussed. (Author/TJ)

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TRAINING AND SUPERVISING STUDENT TUTORS FOR COLLEGE READING PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING AND SUPERVISING STUDENT TUTORS

FOR COLLEGE READING PROGRAMS

Describes the criteria for hiring student tutors, tutoring responsibilities, the training program, and the supervision provided in college developmental reading programs. Some general guidelines for planning a tutoring training program and for supervising the tutors are enumerated. Specific suggestions for planning preservice and inservice programs are presented as are the areas in which the college tutors often require continuing assistance. Special considerations involved in supervising are noted and common problems recognized. Finally, the effectiveness of college level student tutors is discussed.

TRAINING AND SUPERVISING STUDENT TUTORS

FOR COLLEGE READING PROGRAMS

Being faced with the problem of helping students who do not read well enough to cope with college level material, colleges are relying on trained tutors to maximize the contributions of reading specialists and to stay within their limited budgets.

The tutoring formats are varied. Small groups of students with common needs may be placed in "tutoring seminars" which frequently foster positive interaction among the participants. In the classroom, "tutorial assistants" aid the students in interpreting the professor's lecture or understanding the directions given in an assignment and reduce the instructional ratio. The commonest form, "individual tutoring," provides for specific, focused instruction and personalized attention (Beitler and Martin 1973).

Selection and Training

The selection and training of student tutors requires a great deal of thought, planning, and follow-up. Certain personality traits and academic achievements are prerequisite for success. Good tutors tend to have certain personality traits in common: (1) an attitude of helpfulness, (2) enthusiasm for the task, (3) an ability to get along with others, (4) a desire to learn, and most importantly (5) sensitivity to the problems faced by the tutee (Rauch 1969). Also the tutor's commitment in terms of time must be examined. Does he realistically have the time to attend training sessions, teach, follow through on the lessons, and confer with his supervisor? Much of this information can be obtained through the use of questionnaires and interviews. Concerning academic qualifications, an overall average of C with A's and B's in reading training courses is generally suggested (Beitler and Martin 1973).

Once the tutors are selected, preservice sessions are crucial. Tutors usually are concerned about specific tutorial techniques, what materials to select, and the personality of the students they will be assigned. An informal first session can create an atmosphere in which the prospective tutors feel free to ask questions. During this early question and answer stage, it is important to get across the realizations that establishing a rapport between the tutor and his student is essential before instruction can begin and that the tutee is often a frustrated person and this must

be taken into account when planning for and working with him (Criscuolo 1971).

Among other topics that might be covered in the early sessions are: (1) instruction on where the tutor can obtain information and advice, (2) tutor expectancy of tutee performance, (3) procedures for checking out materials, and (4) the paperwork required (Moran 1976; Steiner 1977). This can be followed by more technical meetings in which instructional techniques are demonstrated and materials examined. The preservice period may last approximately five sessions. But the tutor will continue to need assistance.

In an on-going training program, tutors might be instructed in (1) relating a tutorial session to a previous one through the use of various activities, (2) using a spaced review system, (3) charting the tutee's progress and keeping other records, (4) developing motivational techniques such as positive reinforcement, (5) using specific appropriate materials, and (6) designing cloze exercises (Boraks and Allen 1977; Dreyer 1973). Other topics will surface as the program continues. Regular meetings at which tutors also have an opportunity to share their experiences and talk out their problems with members of the professional staff and other tutors mitigate their feelings of isolation.

Supervision

The task of the supervisor is a multifaceted one. It involves: (1) appraising the tutor's performance, (2) assessing his behavior

to obtain ideas for possible topics for inservice sessions, (3) diagnosing his strengths and weaknesses in teaching, (4) recommending appropriate materials and strategies, and (5) providing feedback. But possibly the most essential undertaking of the supervisor is convincing the tutor that the supervision process is a cooperative venture. Also the establishment of a rapport between the tutor and supervisor is just as important as it is between the tutor and tutee. The peer tutor needs to know that he has someone to whom he can go for assistance and advice, just as the tutee needs to know that he can depend on the tutor for help and counsel.

Perhaps during the preservice training period, the difference between "supervision" and "snoopervision" can be emphasized. Supervision means "vision from above" or "overseeing," while snoopervision implies a fault-finding activity. But how can the supervisor supervise rather than snoopervise? One way is to provide the tutors with a list of behaviors that the supervisor expects to see when observing. An even better approach is to develop that list together during one of the preservice sessions, thereby reinforcing the notion that supervision is indeed a cooperative endeavor. In any event, awareness of what behaviors are looked for in the tutoring situation by the supervisor lessens the anxiety of the tutors, particularly in the initial stages.

When observing, some supervisors prefer to use a checklist combined with a rating scale to indicate how well or poorly a behavior is exhibited, while others prefer to observe only after

ascertaining what the tutor's objectives are. The "rating form" has the advantage of serving as a convenient starting point from which to discuss the tutor's teaching and make recommendations. On the other hand, "observation by objectives" forces attention on the accomplishment of goals, thereby putting the observation in a different light. Tutors frequently prefer the latter method of supervision since they feel somewhat more in control of the situation because their objectives may be reached by a number of different routes.

Whichever strategy is utilized, the following guidelines should be kept in mind. First, focus on the total situation, not the tutor alone. Second, diagnose rather than judge the tutor's teaching skill. Third, encourage self-evaluation by requesting the tutor to analyze and evaluate his own performance immediately after the instructional session. This can serve as a basis for discussion during the tutor-supervisor conference. Fourth, avoid prompting a tutor or providing information on his effectiveness as he is teaching. This is counterproductive because the tutor will shift his attention from the student being tutored to the observer and thus step out of his role as the teacher. Reserve all comments and suggestions for a later time when the tutee is not present. Fifth, encourage some experimentation in using different approaches and materials (Burg and others 1978). Conversely, the supervisor must also resist the temptation to bombard the tutor with suggestions to use too many different materials. It is better for a

tutor to work with fewer appropriate materials but learn to use them effectively. Sixth, require that written records be kept detailing the extent and type of work either planned or accomplished. Through a combination of observations and analysis of the tutor's plans or log, the supervisor can provide feedback. And seventh, schedule group as well as individual conferences so that the tutors may exchange ideas and analyze their successes and failures. Dreyer in 1973 found that individual conferences were less effective than group discussions.

However handled, close supervision is essential for one of the major problems a supervisor of student tutors has is making sure that they show up for their tutoring appointments. Moran (1976) recommends that tutors who miss more than a few scheduled tutoring sessions be dismissed.

Effectiveness

How successful are college-level peer tutoring programs? Only a qualified answer can be given. Student tutors are successful with some students, under some circumstances, and in achieving some goals. Few colleges have evaluated their peer tutoring programs and until a consistent theory of the peer tutoring process is formulated, it would be unwise to generalize or draw conclusions other than to say that there does not seem to be any clear cut evidence that college reading programs employing student tutors are any more successful than those that do not. This is

substantiated by a study completed in 1971 by Yuthas who compared four groups of community college students and discovered that students who were given remedial help, whether in traditional faculty-taught reading classes or tutored in a reading laboratory by other college students, differed significantly from unaided students in persistence in remaining in college. Poor reading students who received no help dropped out at a very high rate. The vocabulary and comprehension gains were similar in both the remedial programs, thus the investigator postulated that using student tutors did not weaken the reading program and resulted in savings.

But dealing with this kind of data exclusively is risky according to Dreyer (1973) who remarked that teachers are frequently impressed by the positive change in both tutor and pupil self-confidence. Nonetheless, systematic research in the area is necessary. Steiner (1977) points to the difficulty in isolating an adequate control group, the indefinable and immeasurable relationship between the tutor and tutee, and the morality of furnishing a beneficial program for some students, but not all.

There are, however, some indicators of effectiveness of tutorial support that can be utilized in the interim. Quantitative measures include an increase in grade point average, a decrease in attrition rates, and the total number of graduates. Qualitative data on attitude change, increased self-esteem, and the feeling of "success expectation" may be obtained from coded pre- and post-questionnaires, interviews, conferences, and recorded observations

(Beitler and Martin 1973).

Conclusion

When college reading programs employ student tutors, it appears that all three parties benefit, the college student in need of help, the tutor, and the college itself. The remedial student tends to remain in school, perhaps because he finds an understanding peer, the tutor, to tell his academic problems to. When he is discouraged, the special, personal attention from his tutor may be the reason he resists the temptation to quit. The tutor, on the other hand, gains in self-confidence and in many cases earns some money without having to go off campus. If he is an education major, he also reaps the added benefit of getting additional training and experience that may be of value later in his career. At the same time, the college secures the services of trained personnel, through the preservice and inservice programs, at the least possible cost for the largest number of students.

Though one or two semesters of tutorial help may not make-up for twelve years of unsuccessful education, tutoring by students is a worthwhile adjunct to a college's developmental reading program.

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